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LETTER DATED 16 JUNE 1998 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF ETHIOPIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

With reference and in response to the letter from the Permanent Representative of Eritrea dated 15 June 1998, and its annex, a statement issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Eritrea on the same date (S/1998/508), I have the honour to transmit a statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, issued through the Permanent Mission of Ethiopia to the United Nations on 16 June 1998.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Duri MOHAMMED
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex

Press statement issued on 16 June 1998 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia

Asmara trying to deceive the international community on the nature of the moratorium on air strikes

It must be stated quite categorically that the crisis between Ethiopia and Eritrea, growing out of the invasion of Ethiopian sovereign territory by Eritrea, has continued to deteriorate day by day and, despite the misleading information from Asmara, the latest being the statement issued by their Foreign Ministry on 15 June 1998, there has been absolutely no change for the better in this military confrontation imposed on Ethiopia. In fact, what one can conclude from the behaviour in Asmara and from their continuing attempt to deceive the international community is that there is yet no preparedness on the part of the Eritrean authorities to withdraw from the Ethiopian territory that they have occupied by force.

In the above-mentioned statement of 15 June by the Eritrean Foreign Ministry, Asmara attempts to deceive the international community and its own people by suggesting that there was "agreement with Ethiopia on a partial cessation of hostilities as a positive and first step towards ending the war".

As should be obvious to all following this tragic development, Ethiopia has never as yet taken any military initiative of its own, even in self-defence, either on the ground or in the air. What it has done so far has been to respond to the various military moves, on the ground and in the air, launched by the Eritrean authorities. Ethiopia has taken no initiative of its own. Not yet. Whether Ethiopia does this or not wholly depends on whether there is a possibility for ensuring the withdrawal of Eritrean troops from Ethiopian territory peacefully, as has been proposed by the facilitators and as was endorsed by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity (OAU).

As long as there is a glimmer of hope that the territorial integrity of Ethiopia would be restored peacefully, Ethiopia would continue to exercise self-restraint, because Ethiopia's objective is the restoration of its dignity and not the means by which this is achieved, though the peaceful method is its priority.

Accordingly, Ethiopia has, at the behest of friendly Governments, most particularly of the United States of America, agreed to a unilateral moratorium on air strikes as long as it is not put in a situation, by the activities of the aggressors, requiring it to respond in kind.

This is not, by any stretch of the imagination, "a positive and first step towards ending the war", as the Eritrean authorities would like the international community to believe. This is a lie and a fabrication designed to mislead the international community as well as its own people. For Eritrea to suggest that there is an agreement "with Ethiopia on a partial cessation of

hostilities" shows how the Eritrean authorities are totally incapable of learning from their mistakes and how their every step and every utterance should be followed with care.

The Foreign Ministry of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, therefore, wishes to reiterate that the crisis between Ethiopia and Eritrea, far from having shown any improvement, is in fact worsening by the day. For Ethiopia, the bottom line is the liberation of its land, first and foremost. Aggressors cannot and should not be rewarded. Eritrea did not invade Ethiopian territory by mistake and it did not stumble into a quagmire unwittingly. They launched the invasion to create illegal facts on the ground, believing that this time around as well they could get away with creating a fait accompli on a peace-loving country. They are used to invading countries and inviting them to talk. Ethiopia has declined the invitation. First, because it is a matter of dignity for Ethiopia and its people. Secondly, because it is a matter for Ethiopia of discharging its responsibility for protecting principles of international law governing inter-State relations. The Eritrean authorities should be told enough is enough. Therefore, the insinuation on the part of the Eritrean authorities that Ethiopia is backtracking on these commitments is a lie and an insult to the intelligence of the international community.

Ethiopia has said, as long as there is a glimmer of hope for resolving the crisis peacefully, it would give peace a chance. Thus, the unilateral moratorium on air strikes. It is important therefore for the international community to convey a clear message to the Eritrean authorities that the only remaining opportunity for averting a disaster is for both parties to cooperate with the facilitators and to accept and implement the proposal made by the same. This is what the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of OAU at its thirty-fourth session has appealed to them to do. Eritrea should be prevailed upon to comply with this voice of Africa at the highest level.

In this context, if Ethiopia is convinced at any time that peace has no chance and that the Eritrean authorities have closed all doors to reason, then Ethiopia would exercise its legitimate right of self-defence by utilizing whatever capacity it has on the ground or in the air for the purposes of achieving this noble and just objective.

Therefore, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia would like to advise all those with interest in this crisis imposed on Ethiopia that the statement issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Eritrea on 15 June 1998 is based on lies and pure fabrication and is intended to confuse the international community and create a false sense of normalcy for its own people.